

Humanists at help



We all know that advances in human happiness come from fundamental changes in society, often promoted by pressure groups. By supporting the British Humanist Association, you support a body which reflects your particular concerns as a humanist.

But Humanism also means care and concern for others, yet, we, who should be in the forefront of social action, often seem to lag behind.

So—you have no time to spare?

Neither have most people but someone has to find time. One hour a month is little enough to ask *any* citizen to spend in being actively involved with the needs of his community.

So—you could spare one hour a month?

Splendid, that is twelve hours a year, and in twelve hours you should be able to show that humanists are not a bunch of cranks or a cold, dry, isolationist group who have opted out of the rough and tumble of living, but people who care in a practical and enlightened way for their neighbour.

HOW TO START

Now that you have decided to take action, how should you start? To pick a project at random, even if it is a national priority, may prove to be a waste of time and effort. Old People's Welfare is a worthy cause, but it may be that in your area there is already a lively association doing a good job. Better to look at the field and then make a reasoned choice.

GET TO KNOW

your neighbourhood. Spend some time on this. Find out what goes on in your town, what facilities and services are available and how they are run. You can visit the Library and Citizens Advice Bureau; read the local papers; attend council meetings; take an interest in the local Council of Social Service; learn the aims and achievements of all the associations in the area. Above all, listen to people around you—the grumbles you hear in the bus queue or in the doctor's waiting-room may well point to something that needs doing. There may be social needs in your area that no-one is aware of. Some pointers may be found from our book-list (available separately). Arrange for each member of the group to become acquainted with one aspect of life in the town and to report back at the next meeting.

EVALUATE YOUR INFORMATION

Pool your knowledge and make a list of the things which seem to need attention. Don't be carried away by the heart-rending pleas for help of one enthusiastic local official—his priority is his own department. How large a task do the problems seem to present? Analyse large problems and break them down into smaller, manageable parts. For example, Old People's Welfare would be a vast subject to tackle, but perhaps you could cope with arranging a visiting hairdresser or a lunch club. Are any of the problems you have listed already the responsibility of existing statutory or voluntary bodies?—don't tread on other people's toes. If a new agency (you!) needs to be set up, what sort of work would be involved? And what sort of finance?

REVIEW YOUR OWN RESOURCES

Be quite clear and realistic about how much you or your group can do. Do not be dismayed if only two or three people can devote time and energy to a project. Great things can be accomplished by two or three people working together with occasional support from the rest of the group. Have you any specialist knowledge within the group that could be used on a particular project? Is the group equipped to initiate a major project which will need support for years, or is it more suited to carrying out a series of short campaigns? Be honest with yourselves, but do not underestimate your capacities.

CHOOSING YOUR PROJECT

Almost anything can be a project. You might plan to run a club for deprived teenagers, or you might campaign to get a school warden on a dangerous crossing. It is difficult sometimes to assess just how much work will be involved in doing a job, but having narrowed your choice to two or three possibles, do spend time talking around them and learning from people engaged in similar fields, before taking a final decision.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Having made your choice, plan your project on paper. Test your ideas. Arm yourselves with facts and figures. You may have to carry out a survey. Make sure your questions do not suggest the answer you are looking for. Carrying out a survey may mean speaking to everyone who passes along a certain street, or it may mean house-to-house visiting—every door, one in three, one in ten. If, for example, you think that a particular area needs a children's playground, do, before you start campaigning, find out if there are any children living in that area! Look at your facts. Does the need really exist? If so, go ahead!

GETTING SUPPORT

Don't think you are self sufficient and don't be too independent to ask for help and support. Talk to the Editor of your local paper—he will give you good publicity. But talk facts to him, not vague conjecture or castles in the air. To get local support, stir up indignation rather than enthusiasm—it lasts longer! DON'T say 'wouldn't it be nice for the children to have a playground, please support our campaign'. DO say 'It's a downright disgrace that our children don't have anywhere to play. We pay just as much in rates as anyone, should OUR children be killed on the streets? Sign the petition here please!' Don't openly attack any group of people, only the system that they are forced by circumstances to operate. Give praise where it is due, and sympathise with people's difficulties and they will regard you as intelligent and of good-will, and may even give you moral and financial support for your project. You will be surprised at the variety of causes that a Local Authority can and will help financially once they are convinced of your serious intent and general competence.

HAVE A GO

even if you seem to be alone in your wish to get something done. YOU can provide the initiative needed to get others stirred to action. Expect to find problems—they are there to be overcome.

DON'T BE CONTENT

with one successful project. There's an awful lot left to tackle. Try to get other groups working as well. Your aim as a humanist is to encourage everyone to take an interest in the world around them and to help them to see that with a little concerted action they can have an effect on conditions and can indeed 'make it good to be alive'.



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